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JOHN HOWIE OF LOCHGOIN

HIS FOREBEARS
AND HIS WORKS

By D. HAY FLEMING



FROM
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THE PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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NUMBER I

JOHN HOWIE OF LOCHGOIN: HIS FOREBEARS AND HIS WORKS.

Throughout Scotland and beyond it, John Howie has been a power for good for more than a century. Strictly speaking, he ought to be described as John Howie *in* Lochgoin, not *of* Lochgoin, as he was merely the tenant, not the owner; but the Howie family have occupied that moor-land farm for so many generations that they are constantly and naturally spoken of as the Howies of Lochgoin; and of the many Johns in that family the author of *The Scots Worthies* is preëminently known as John Howie of Lochgoin.

There is no certainty as to the precise year, not even as to the precise century, in which the Howie's first went to Lochgoin; nor is there any certainty as to the district or country from which they came. The origin of the Howies, indeed, like that of many of the oldest landed Scottish families, is lost in the haze of antiquity.

In one passage, the author of *The Scots Worthies* thus refers to the origin of his family:

"Our house had been very ancient in suffering for religion; (some have said that our first progenitors in this land fled from the French persecution in the 9th century)."¹

It will be noticed that he does not vouch for the truth of

¹ *Memoirs*, 1796, p. 153.

the tradition, for he cautiously qualifies it—"some have said".

In the old *Statistical Account of Fenwick*, printed in 1795, and written by the Rev. William Boyd, there is this paragraph:

"Far up in the moor grounds of the barony of Rowallan, there is a farm called *Serdgoin* [plainly a misprint for *Lochgoin*]. It is entirely a sheep farm. It has been possessed for many successive generations by a family of the name of Howie. The tradition of the family is, that the first who settled there was a refugee from the persecution of the Waldenses. There is no doubt, but they have resided there for some hundred years. The place is exceedingly remote. And it is not likely that any, at that time, would have taken up their residence there, had they not considered it as a place where they were not in danger of being molested. The master of the family has been a John Howie for many generations, till within these few months, that both father and son—both Johns—died."

It may be noted in passing that John the father, whose death is thus referred to, was the author of *The Scots Worthies*. But at this point it is more important to note that in the hands of later writers than John Howie and the Rev. William Boyd, the traditional origin of the family becomes much more definite.

Thus we are gravely told that, in the year 1178, "three brothers of the name of Hoi, or Hoy, now Howie, came from one of the Waldensian valleys to escape the fury of the persecution, and found refuge in Lochgoin".² The date has been given less definitely as "towards the close of the twelfth century"; and the three brothers have also been represented as Albigenses from the south of France, and are alleged to have respectively settled in the parish of Mearns, the parish of Craigie, and at Lochgoin.³ It has likewise been affirmed that the present worthy occupier is "the twenty-eighth John Howie in the direct line".⁴ But

² Thomson's *Martyr Graves of Scotland*, 1875, i., p. 140.

³ W. H. Carlsaw's edition of *The Scots Worthies*, p. ix.

⁴ Kerr's *Lochgoin Conventicle*, p. 3.

in support of these very definite statements no satisfactory proof has been produced; nothing, indeed, beyond tradition, and a date incised on the lintel of a door. Now it can never be safe to trust to any tradition which professes to go back through so many centuries; and as for the date on the lintel, too much reliance has been placed on it, when it is regarded as evidence that the brothers came to this country in the year 1178.

On the lintel referred to there are three dates and the initials J. H. The three dates are 1178, 1710 and 1810. It has been supposed, and the supposition is a reasonable one, that the dates were intended to refer to "changes that have taken place either upon their family or their abode". But between the first two dates there is a very long gap, a gap of 532 years. How is that gap to be accounted for? During all these centuries was there no great outstanding fact in the history of the family or the abode calling for the incision of a date on the lintel?

Judging from the appearance of the three dates and the initials on the present lintel, they have been all cut at one time; and it may therefore be assumed that that time could not be before the latest of the three dates—1810. In the old house there was an older lintel with dates; and these dates were very much worn and weathered. As I understood Mr. John Howie, on my visit in September, 1906, it was because these dates were so worn out that they were reproduced on the present lintel. It is, therefore, extremely likely that the earliest date was misread.

Arabic numerals do not seem to have been used for inscriptions in Britain before the fifteenth century; and when they came into use they differed considerably from their present forms. The 5 of the sixteenth century may easily be mistaken for a 1; and personally I have little doubt that the earliest date on the old lintel at Lochgoin was 1578, not 1178.

If the Howie's bore that name in 1178 they must have been among the earliest families in Scotland to bear a sur-

name. According to Cosmo Innes, even the race of Stuart was distinguished by no surnames for several generations after the Norman conquest. Surnames were first used in Scotland, he says, in the twelfth century, and came into general use in the thirteenth.⁵

One of the nineteenth century editors of *The Scots Worthies*, himself a Howie, backs up the tradition, of the three refugee brothers arriving in the twelfth century, by affirming that the tradition receives "confirmation from the fact that this [the district of Ayrshire and Renfrewshire] is almost the only part of Scotland where persons bearing this name [the name of Howie] are to be met with." The basis of this argument, as will be immediately shown, is utterly worthless.

Although I doubt the accuracy of the earliest date on the lintel of the door, and question the soundness of the inference that has been drawn from it, I am convinced that the Howie's have been in Lochgoin for a very long period. Paterson, in his *History of the County of Ayr* (ii., p. 58), cites a few clauses from the will of "Johnne Howie in Lochgoyne", who died in February, 1614. From these clauses it is learned that his wife's name was Dorothy Gemmill, and that he had five sons and a daughter, whose names were—Arthur, William, Stein, Andrew, Alexander, and Agnes. Even though this John Howie had been the first of his name in Lochgoin, the line would be carried back in him for three centuries; and many of his forebears may have been there before him. How many, it may now be impossible to find out; but there is record evidence (in the *Register of the Great Seal* and other official registers) to show that long before his time the Howies were widely sprinkled over Scotland.

There was a Nicholas Howye in Brechin before 1469, an Andrew Howy near Abernethy in 1490, a John Howe at "Craganis", Renfrewshire, in 1515, a William Howe at Dirleton in 1519, an Andrew Howe at Aberdeen in 1523,

⁵ *Concerning Some Scotch Surnames*, pp. 4, 5.

a Nicholas Howie in Berwickshire and a Lawrence Howy in Edinburgh in 1527, a William Howie (or Howye) in Brechin in 1528, a John Howie vicar of Kilmaurs in 1538, a Geoffrey Howe at Dunure in 1541, a Pait Howe on the Borders in 1544, an Alexander Howe at Tealing in Forfarshire in 1548, an Helen Howye at "Camesesken" in Ayrshire in 1552, a Dand (*i. e.*, Andrew) Howe (or Howy) near Kelso in 1567, an Helen Howy (or Howie) in Kennoway in 1576, a Bernard Howye and a Henry Howye in Gullane in 1578, an Effie Howie in St. Andrews in 1584, Robert Howie (afterwards Principal of St. Mary's College, St. Andrews) was a minister in Aberdeen by 1591, and in 1595 there was a Thomas Howye in Northumberland.

There were Howisons in St. Andrews by 1430; and in Edinburgh by 1450; and there must have been Howies before there were Howisons.

Such references could easily be multiplied, but these are enough to show that Howies were scattered over a great part of Scotland long before the close of the sixteenth century.

The name is spelled in various ways: Howe, Howye, Howy, Howie, Houye. Bernard Howye in Gullane has his surname given in three different forms, one of these being Holly. This last may be due to a clerical error, for in the handwriting of the sixteenth century *w* is frequently very like *ll*. It has been suggested by one of those who suppose that the Howies originally came from the south of France, that the French form of the name was *Huet*. In this connection it may be mentioned that one of Queen Mary's cooks, after her return from France, was named Martin Huet. He was the "potager", the cook who made the soups.⁶ In Fife, perhaps in other parts of Scotland, *Howie* is commonly pronounced *Hooie*.

The most interesting personal details concerning John Howie and his forebears are learned from a little book pub-

⁶ Teulet's *Papiers D'État*, ii., p. 131.

lished in 1796, and which is now extremely rare. It bears the title:

“Memoirs of the Life of John Howie: who lived in Lochgoin, parish of Fenwick, and died January 5th, 1793. Containing a series of religious exercises, soul-soliloquies, meditations, and an account of the Lord’s goodness to him in general. [Psalm lxvi. 16 quoted.] To which is subjoined a short later (*sic*) will, or dying testimony of James Howie, who lived in Lochgoin, and died soon after the Revolution. Glasgow: Printed for James Howie, Lochgoin. 1796.”

The bulk of this little book was written by John Howie himself; and his narrative runs in the first person singular. But there is a prefatory epistle “to the reader”, signed “publishers”, and dated “Lochgoin, August 22, 1796”. At the end of the autobiographical portion there is a section entitled “Observations concerning the author”. At the end of this section there is this intimation:

“As the Memoirs have fallen short of the pages specified in the proposals, it was thought proper to subjoin the author’s great-grandfather’s dying testimony, who lived in the time of the late persecuting period, and came through a series of hardships therein, upon account of his non-compliance with the tyrannical measures of the then powers.”

This was the testimony of James Howie,⁷ who died on the 19th of November, 1691, and the testimony is followed by another section entitled:

“A short narrative of James Howie’s sufferings in the late persecution: with some of his last words at the time of his death.”

One cannot read this supplementary matter without feeling thankful that room was found for it, especially for the “short narrative”. It states that this James Howie “was born in the parish of Mearns, in the shire of Renfrew, and was married to Isabel Howie, oldest daughter of John

⁷ John Calderwood of Clanfin included this testimony in the “Collection of the Dying Testimonies” which he published in 1806. He knew, of course, that it had been printed in 1796; but the edition of the *Memoirs*, he says, was small, and so he reprinted it with the other testimonies “according to the original MS. copy.”

Howie in Lochgoin"; that "he came to Lochgoin and lived along with his father-in-law till he died"; that his hardships began in the winter of 1666, the winter after the battle of Pentland Hills, and known as "Pentland Hills winter", because those who had been at that battle "had to flee into corners and muir places, of which Lochgoin was one; and in these concealed places they spent their time in prayer and religious conference in a social way". Lochgoin was admirably adapted as a place of refuge. In the *New Statistical Account of Fenwick*, it is said that:

"The Howies of Lochgoin . . . selected one of the most inaccessible places in the whole country for their residence. The house is altogether inaccessible on the east to horsemen, and an active man could not, even though acquainted with the locality, at night cross the moss by which it is defended, but at the risk of his life; and no stranger could venture across it with safety, even in day-light, without a guide. On the west, the only direction from which it can be approached, a sentinel was always stationed in times of danger, whence he could command an extensive view of the whole country as far as Ailsa Craig and the hills of Arran, and thus no body of troopers could reach the house, before the inmates had time to escape into the morasses. A situation like this was invaluable as a place of resort to the Covenanters."

Notwithstanding the difficulty of access in former times, the soldiers frequently found their way to Lochgoin, and the inmates had several narrow escapes. On one occasion old John Howie (the father-in-law of James, and the great-great-grandfather of the author of *The Scots Worthies*) had gone to bed, worn out with an attack of asthma, and fell asleep. He dreamed that he was at Kilmarnock Cross, and heard General Dalzell give orders to a party of his men to go to Lochgoin and search for Pentland rebels. They compelled him to go with them as guide; and, after accompanying them two miles, one of the soldiers maltreated him so badly that he awoke. He again fell asleep, and again dreamed that he was acting as guide to the soldiers; and that, when they were crossing a water, one of them took

him by the shoulders and pushed him into the stream. He awoke; but again fell asleep and again he dreamed that he was leading the soldiers; and that he accompanied them until "he came to his own hill-foot", where they again ill-treated him. He awoke for the third time, and was so impressed by the dream that he cried aloud to those who were sheltering in the house to look out. They ran to "a little height at the house-end", and, in the grey light of the morning, discerned the gleaming bayonets within forty fells of the house. They had just time to rush into a low-lying ground and moss, which led into a brook, under the banks of which they got out of sight. Old John Howie was too frail to flee; and, throwing his cloak about him, he went out and met the first party of the soldiers as they reached the end of his house. The story told by the breathless old man, as to why the fire was on so early in the morning, allayed their suspicions; and, after taking food enough to satisfy their hunger, they went back to Kilmarnock.

Among those who frequented Lochgoin were Ker of Kersland, Captain Paton, Alexander Shields, and Balfour of Kinloch, better known as Burley. Once at least Renwick took refuge there; and, as by his continuous wanderings, his shoes were worn out, James Howie, it is stated, "got a new pair for him to keep his feet dry".

One morning before sunrise young John Howie was hastily awakened by his mother, who charged him to run out of the house. Before he was ten fells from the door, several guns were fired at him; but he was not hit, and being young and swift of foot, he out-distanced his pursuers; and, getting into a place sometimes occupied by otters, he drew in a heather turf after him and so escaped observation. His father, James Howie, being older, was not so able to run, but had started earlier, and the soldiers lost sight of him. They caught a shepherd, however, and, putting him on his oath, demanded whether he had seen a black dog, with white hose and shoes on his feet, pass him. The man replied, I did not see a black dog with white hose and shoes on his

feet. He had indeed seen James Howie, but, before he saw him, James had cast off his coat, which was black, and also his shoes and hose, and was running bare-footed.

Isabel Howie, James' wife, was a brave woman. On one occasion, when five of the sufferers had spent the whole night with her husband in prayer and conversation, they were surprised in the morning. The night had been very stormy, and, on that account, they felt the more secure. Suddenly the door was opened, and a sergeant, who had left his men outside, stepped in. Isabel Howie at once rushed up to him, and, exerting all her strength, pushed him backwards towards the door. In the struggle he fell, and the gun dropped out of his hand. The Covenanters ran into the byre, which communicated with the house, and emerged in two parties, James Howie and his son John leaving the byre by one of its two doors, and the rest leaving it by the other. The larger party had to run four or five miles in order to escape. From that day, Isabel Howie was a marked woman; and many a cold night she had to spend in a moss-hag with a young child at her breast. Before the Revolution came, the house of Lochgoin had been plundered twelve times.

All these incidents and many more concerning the hardships and dangers to which his ancestors and their friends had been subjected, must have been known to the author of *The Scots Worthies* from his childhood. As already mentioned, James Howie died in November, 1691. His son John, who was born in the year before Pentland Rising, lived to the great age of 90 and died in the summer of 1755. By that time his grandson, John, who was destined to achieve literary fame, was already in his twentieth year, having been born in November, 1735; and, although brought up at Black's Hill, in the adjoining parish of Kilmarnock, he must have learned much from his venerable grandsire in Lochgoin.

Although there are many interesting details in the *Memoirs*, published in 1796, the little volume may be

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searched in vain for many things that one would like to know concerning the personal history of the author of *The Scots Worthies*. For the omissions, John Howie is not to be blamed. The portion which he wrote himself was not intended as an autobiography, but was entitled: "A brief narrative of some Religious Exercises", etc. It begins thus:

"Although I had a religious education, and my grandfather and grandmother (with whom I was brought up from the time I was a year old, at Black's Hill in the parish of Kilmarnock) were reputed, in the place where they lived, for honest, religious persons; yet in my younger years, I was mostly taken up with the common vanities of childhood and youth, having no certain views of religion, or my own depraved, lost state, and condition."

It may be noted that he neither gives the year of his birth, nor states how long he lived at Black's Hill; that he neither gives the names of his grandfather and grandmother, who lived there, nor states whether they were his paternal or maternal ancestors; that he makes no reference to his father or mother; that, although he tells that he himself was twice married, he does not give the name of either wife, or the date of either marriage. Eighty years ago, M'Gavin thought of giving a short account of his life; but was informed, by one of Howie's nephews, that his family possessed ample materials for a volume, and therefore he left the subject untouched, in the hope that a Howie would do it justice. If these materials were in the chest containing his papers, they have probably perished, for some fifty years ago it was found that the mice had got into the chest, and reduced its contents to "mulins".

Fortunately, in 1835, the Rev. John Carslaw, of Airdrie, prefixed a short memoir to his edition of *The Scots Worthies*. From this memoir it appears that the old John Howie, who died in 1755, had a son John who lived with him; that this son John was twice married, his first wife being Martha Thomson,⁸ by whom he had two sons and two daughters;

⁸Carslaw gives October, 1784, as the date of this marriage. This is probably a misprint for October, 1734.

that he died suddenly in 1754, that is, a year before his aged father; that the eldest of the two sons borne by Martha Thomson was the author of *The Scots Worthies*; and that it was to Martha's father, John Thomson in Black's Hill, that he was sent when he was a year old. Carslaw also states that, in his boyhood, he attended two schools, one taught by his uncle, James Howie, at Whirlhall, the other by Adam Millar at Horsehill; that his first wife was named Jean Lindsay, and the second Janet Howie; that by the first he had one son, and by the second five sons and three daughters; and that, as his step-mother remained several years at Lochgoin after his father's death, he did not occupy the farm until shortly after his first marriage, that was, in or about the year 1762.

We now turn again, for a little, to the *Memoirs of 1796*. John Howie confesses that in his youth he was thoughtless and careless; but the only vice with which he could charge himself was his inclination "to too much vain and unprofitable discourse when in company". He says, however, that, after he was grown up, he soon found "predominant evils" ingrained in his constitution, which, through the want of restraining grace and the omission of secret prayer, overcame him. The early death of his first wife "somewhat affected" him; but his corruptions revived upon him, and he was reproached by some of his neighbours and relations, who thought that he was much worse than he really was, and some people rashly blamed him for things that he was innocent of. Regarding his slanderers he says: "I wish the Lord may give them forgiveness, as I wish and expect forgiveness for what occasion I gave them, and for what I was justly chargeable in the sight of a holy God with." All this time he had kept up family worship, and attended divine ordinances and society meetings. In a formal way he usually prayed in secret; but sometimes neglected even the formal performance of this duty.

"At last", he says, "I married again a cousin of my own [this was Janet Howie], who was of a quiet disposition,

and under the character of a religious woman; after which I kept more to the form of an outward profession; and having, from my younger years, had great pleasure in reading biography, the eminent lives and comfortable deaths of Christ's faithful witnesses, both under Antichrist Popish and Prelatic, and having thereby gained a strong regard for the memories and contendings of our *Scots Worthies*, both in the reforming and suffering period; in process of time I thought of publishing Mr. James Renwick's large life, which was wrote by Mr. Alexander Shields; but, upon second thoughts, I took up a resolution to collect what materials I could obtain, and write a kind of lives of a number of them, which I did at leisure hours, with small views that ever anything I could do should merit the publishing of them: however, my motives were ingenuous, out of love to them and their contendings or cause they contended for: and the Lord determined that they should both be published and much esteemed by men of all ranks and denominations. While I was writing and collecting the first draught of the *Scots Worthies*, sometimes in the morning; one morning my wife, who was not without an inclination to religion, being in bed in the little closet where I was writing, she was just going to give me a reproof for my folly in writing; what would I do but make people laugh at my folly; immediately these words came into her mind, Mark vii. 37. *He hath done all things well; he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.* After which she durst never speak against it."

Such is John Howie's simple, artless story as to how he came to write his first and most popular book, and how he managed to accomplish it. The title is:

"Biographia Scoticana: or a Brief Historical Account of the Lives, Characters, and Memorable Transactions of the most eminent SCOTS WORTHIES, noblemen, gentlemen, ministers, and others: from Mr. Patrick Hamilton, who was born about the year of our Lord 1503, and suffered martyrdom at St. Andrews, Feb. 1527, to Mr. James Renwick, who was executed in the Grass-market of Edinburgh, Feb. 17, 1688. Together with a succinct account of the lives of other seven eminent divines, and Sir Robert Hamilton of Preston, who died at or shortly after the Revolution. Collected from the Historical Records, Biographical Accounts,

and other Authenticated Writings:—the whole including a period of near two hundred years. By a Friend to the covenanted Testimony of the Church of Scotland. The Righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance, Psal. cxii. 6. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her. Psal. lxxxvii. 5. Glasgow: Printed and sold by John Bryce Bookseller, at his shop, opposite Gibson's Wynd, Salt-Market. M.DCC.LXXV."

Like so many old title-pages, this one is crowded with information concerning the substance of the book. The preface is signed "John Howie", and is dated "Lochgoin, July 21, 1775". The most distinctive feature of this, the first edition, is "the Life of Mr. William Vetch . . . wrote by himself". This life, which extends to 73 pages, is altogether out of proportion to the rest of the book. In the preface Howie explains that he had no opportunity of seeing it, as it was "sent in to the printer from a private gentleman, who had the original copy wrote by Mr. Vetch himself". This is the same life which, fifty years later, was edited, from a copy of the original, by Dr. M'Crie, who does not appear to have known that the memoir was already in type. In all likelihood, he had never seen the first edition of the *Scots Worthies*, which even by that time had become scarce. It is so scarce, indeed, that it is not mentioned in Lowndes' *Bibliographer's Manual*, and Mr. Johnston, in his *Treasury of the Scottish Covenant* (1887, p. 452), says: "No copy is known to exist."⁹ This scarcity is due to its popularity, not to the limited number published, for there was a fairly large impression. The book, in fact, has been thumbed almost out of existence. It contains a list of "the subscribers". In this list there are no fewer than 693 names; and of these people fifteen took 149 copies among them, while each of the others took one copy. Thus ~~842~~ 827 copies were subscribed for before the book was issued.

The title-page of the second edition, which is dated 1781,

⁹I happen to know of eight copies, two of which are in my own collection.

is almost the same as that of the first. But it bears the author's name, and there is this material addition :

"As also, an appendix, containing a short historical hint of the wicked lives and miserable deaths of some of the most remarkable apostates and bloody persecutors in Scotland from the Reformation to the Revolution."

This appendix, which is both instructive and entertaining, has a title-page of its own, and is dated 1782. The chief difference in the book itself is in the life of William Vetch, which is cut down to 12½ pp.; and the reasons for doing this are given in an addition to the preface, which addition is signed "John Howie", and dated "Lochgoin, June, 1781".

These were the only two editions which John Howie saw, but other editions followed in rapid succession. Some of the earlier of these may be briefly noted: Edinburgh, 1796; Glasgow, 1797; Dundee, 1809; Edinburgh, 1812; Glasgow, 1813; Glasgow, 1816; Leith, 1816; Glasgow, 1821.

In all these eight editions the old name, *Biographia Scotiana*, has been retained; but a grave injustice to the author has been perpetrated in all of them. John Howie's name has been kept out of the title-page; and at the end of the preface the words "the editor" have been substituted for "John Howie;" and the word "Lochgoin" has been struck out. His name has also been removed from the appendix on bloody persecutors and apostates. In short, in these eight editions John Howie's name is not to be found!¹⁰

John Howie has suffered many things from many editors. One or two examples must suffice. In telling of Captain Paton's wonderful feats as a swordsman, he adds in a footnote :

"This sword or short shabble yet remains, and may now be seen in the hands of the publisher of this collection. It was then by his progenitors counted to have twenty-eight

¹⁰ An abridged edition was also issued, the anonymous editor of which suppressed Howie's preface, introduction and appendix. Howie's name was also kept out. This abridgment, which was "offered to the public" at one-half the price of the complete work, went through at least two editions; the second was published in 1823, and the preface is dated 1816.

gaps in its edge, which made them afterward observe that there were just as many years in the time of the persecution, as there were ~~wee~~ steps or broken pieces in the edge thereof." re/

In the 1796 edition, the first edition after John Howie's death, the clause—"and may now be seen in the hands of the publisher of this collection"—was omitted. By the "publisher" Howie meant himself, and the "progenitors," who counted the gaps in the edge of the blade, were his own progenitors; but the omission of the clause turned them into Captain Paton's progenitors;¹¹ and, as he was an old man when he suffered martyrdom, this was rather perplexing. This perversion was copied into edition after edition; and Sir Walter Scott, in quoting the foot-note from one of these editions, interjects the remark that by progenitors Howie meant descendants, and adds that it was "a rather unusual use of the word". Notwithstanding this criticism, the foot-note, in its perverted form, continued to appear in later editions of *The Scots Worthies*. In one of these, which professes to be "revised from the author's original edition", and is stereotyped, the perverted note has been lifted into the text!

One editor who made so many alterations and additions that he said "the present will be found, in a great measure, a new work," candidly owned that "the propriety of distinguishing his own [notes], by affixing some mark to them, did not occur to him while the work was in the press." Perhaps the most stupid of all the editorial blunders is to be found in an edition which bears to be "revised and corrected by James Howie, A. M." In that edition a good many sentences have been introduced into the life of Alexander Henderson. These sentences were borrowed, without acknowledgment, from Aiton of Dolphinton, whose work did not appear until forty-three years after John Howie's death. It was bad enough to make John Howie "crib" from such a much later writer; but the editor was capable of much worse

¹¹ The wife of the present Mr. John Howie of Lochgoin is a descendant of the valiant Captain Paton, and one of their daughters is a missionary in China.

than that. In discussing the date of Henderson's admission to Leuchars, Aiton makes this statement: "In the *Biographia Scoticana*, it is said that Henderson entered to Leuchars about the year 1620." Apparently James Howie, A.M., did not know that *Biographia Scoticana* was the old name of *The Scots Worthies*, the work which he was editing, and so, in borrowing from Aiton, he refers to the *Biographia Scoticana* as if it were a different book!

I am not quite certain how many editions of the *Scots Worthies* have been published: but my own collection contains nearly twenty, and I feel safe in asserting that there are probably fifty. How few of the most prominent literary men of the present day can expect to rival in long continued popularity the imperfectly educated farmer of Lochgoin!

Though John Howie had produced nothing else than *The Scots Worthies*, he would have erected a noble monument to his own memory, as well as to the men whom he admired and wished to honour. But when he was once in touch with the reading public, he issued volume after volume. The first of these appeared in 1779, and is entitled:—

"A collection of Lectures and Sermons, preached upon several subjects, mostly in the time of the late persecution. Wherein a faithful doctrinal testimony is transmitted to posterity for the doctrine, worship, discipline and government of the Church of Scotland against Popery, Prelacy, Erastianism, etc. By these faithful and eminent servants of Jesus Christ: Messrs. William Guthrie, Michael Bruce, John Welwood, Richard Cameron, Donald Cargill, Alexander Peden and Alexander Shields. To which are added some sacramental discourses by Mr. John Livingston and Mr. John Welch, and a sermon on the breach of Covenant, by Mr. John Guthrie. Carefully collected and transcribed from several manuscripts by J. H.; and now published at the desire of the owners of that cause, which some of the worthy authors sealed with their blood. [Isaiah lii. 7 partly quoted.] Glasgow: Printed and sold by J. Bryce. M.DCC.LXXIX."

In the preface (dated "Lochgoin, March 9th, 1779") Howie explains that the discourses were mostly taken from the mouths of the preachers in shorthand "by the common

auditory, and mostly by men of a rural education;" and that he had collected them (with the exception of a few, which were formerly in print) "from ten or twelve volumes mostly in an old small cramp hand." As the book extends to considerably over 600 pp., some idea may be formed of the tedious work involved in transcribing it for the press. This book had been well taken up. The list of subscribers' names fills more than 27 double-columned pages. I have not counted the names; but from a rough calculation they must number about 2400. The list would well repay a careful study. It is a most interesting one, and, among other things, it gives a good idea of the class of people who at that time prized the sermons to which their ancestors had listened at the peril of their lives.¹²

The next of John Howie's volumes is one of his most valuable but least known. It was issued in 1780, and is entitled:—

"Faithful Contendings Displayed: being an historical relation of the state and actings of the suffering Remnant in the Church of Scotland, who subsisted in Select Societies, and were united in General Correspondencies during the hottest time of the late Persecution, viz. : from the year 1681 to 1691. Together with an account of the state of the land in general, and of the Society People in particular, in the intervals betwixt each of their general meetings, with some pertinent remarks upon these historical occurrences, and many letters to and from the general correspondent meetings, etc. Collected and kept in record by Mr. Michael Shields, who was clerk unto these General Societies, and personally present at most of their meetings."

The preparation of this volume for the press must have cost Howie much labour. He not only made the transcript, but he abridged some of the papers which he thought of minor importance, and inserted others which he deemed

¹² This volume was republished in 1880, without the subscribers' names, but with a commemoration sermon and biographical notices by the late Dr. James Kerr. This reprint is entitled: "Sermons delivered in Times of Persecution in Scotland, by Sufferers for the Royal Prerogatives of Jesus Christ."

more momentous. He also added an appendix, to shew "upon what footing the more faithful party stood their ground" at and after the Revolution. This was supplemented by James Guthrie's *Considerations of the Dangers that Threaten Religion in Scotland*. This last has a separate title-page, but the pagination and signatures are continuous. To all this there was added:—

"A collection of very valuable sermons preached on several subjects and in divers places in the time of the late persecution, by these eminent servants of Jesus Christ, Messrs. John Kid, John King, John Welch, John Blackadder, John Dickson, and Gabriel Semple. Collected and transcribed from different manuscripts by John Howie. . . ."

This "collection" has a separate title-page and a separate preface, and the pagination and signatures begin afresh; but it was issued as part of the *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, being mentioned on the general title-page. The "collection" had evidently been prepared first, for its preface is dated, "Lochgoin, July 28, 1780;" while the preface to Michael Shields' portion is dated, "Lochgoin, Sept. 27th, 1780." The whole extends to 686 pp.; and another 20 pp. are filled with the "subscribers' names." These names must run up to about 1800 in number. When I first read this book, some thirty years ago, I thought that it was one of the most interesting I had ever gone through. Notwithstanding the large impression that was printed, the book is now by no means common.

In 1780 John Howie issued another book, or rather pamphlet, entitled:—

"An alarm unto a secure Generation; or a short Historical Relation of some of the most strange and remarkable appearances of comets, fiery meteors, bloody signs, ships of war, armies of foot and horsemen fighting, etc., that have been seen since the birth of our Saviour (as the tokens or forerunners both of promised mercies, and threatened judgments) through different ages; particularly those lately observed in the parishes of Finwick, Eglesham, and Kil-marnock: with some arguments and observations upon the

whole, in way of application to our present circumstances. In a letter from John Howie to William Young, student in the University of Glasgow."

This is a very curious little book, and was popularly called *The Fenwick Visions*. I only know it from the second edition, which was printed in Kilmarnock in 1809. The preface is signed "John Howie"; and is dated, "Lochgoin, Feb. 18th, 1780."

It might have been supposed that that little book, and the *Faithful Contendings Displayed* were quite enough to fill his hands at one time; but not so. At the desire of one of the elders of Fenwick parish, he wrote a pamphlet on patronage, which was then a burning question in that parish. This pamphlet is entitled:—"Patronage anatomized and detected," and is dated "Lochgoin, March 19th, 1780." It was sent to Fenwick at that time; but was not published until two years later, the preface "to the public" being dated, "Lochgoin, July 9th, 1782." By allowing it to remain so long unpublished, he was able to complete the history of the Fenwick case: and when he did publish it, he did so "by consent and at the desire of the committee, eldership, and people of Finwick."¹³ Until this time, the parish, he says, had not "actually felt the callous claws of patronage."

He anticipated the objection that might be raised against his intervention. He did not fear the indignation and resentment that might be evoked "both against the writer and

¹³ Here is the full title of the pamphlet as printed:

"Patronage anatomized and detected, or the rise, reign, nature, tendency, effects and evil consequences of Patronage laid open; some objections noticed; and popular election in a few particulars vindicated. In a letter from John Howie to the Eldership and Congregation of the parish of Finwick. To which is prefixed, by way of introduction, a short historical narrative of the whole process betwixt the people of Finwick and the judicatories of the Established Church, setting forth what treatment they have received from said judicatories anent their consent or choice in calling of their own minister. Published at the desire of the said parish of Finwick. [Isa. xxviii. 14, Psal. lxxxii. 2, Lam. iii. 36, John x. 1 partly quoted.] Glasgow: Printed by John Bryce, and sold at his shop, opposite Gibson's Wynd, Salt-Market. 1782."

his small performance." Truth, he says, will be truth, whoever speaks it: and he adds:—"It is hoped these arguments have Scripture to support them; and for historical facts they are stubborn things, and will not yield to every wanton and impudent attack made upon them." In his opinion, patronage was a despotism, and therefore ought to be opposed.

The opposition in Fenwick did not prevent the settlement of the Rev. William Boyd. The parishioners "barricaded the church door and filled the lock with stones to prevent his access, while the beadle refused to ring the bell." He was ordained, not at Fenwick, but at Irvine, on the 25th of June, 1782. For more than 46 years he continued to be the parish minister of Fenwick.¹⁴ After some twelve years' experience of the place, he wrote the old *Statistical Account* of his parish; and, in speaking of the population, he candidly says: "Of these, the great majority are of the class called Burgher-Seceders, who left the establishment at the settlement of the present incumbent." Howie, it need hardly be said, was a Cameronian, not a Seceder.

His next publication was entitled:—"Faithful Witness-Bearing Exemplified." It comprises three distinct items:—

I. Hugh Binning's Useful Case of Conscience.

II. A solemn Testimony against Toleration and prevailing errors, by the Commissioners of the General Assembly and sundry ministers in Perth and Fife.

III. Brown of Wamphray's History of the Indulgence.

These were introduced by John Howie in a preface, "concerning association, toleration, and what is now called Liberty of Conscience." This preface is dated, "Lochgoin, Jan. 18th, 1783". Both editions of *The Scots Worthies*, the volume of sermons, *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, and *Patronage Anatomized*, had all been printed and published by John Bryce, Glasgow. This volume was printed and sold by J. Wilson, Bookseller, Kilmarnock, who is now chiefly remembered as the printer of the first edition of Burns' Poems. The "subscribers' names" at the end of

¹⁴ Scott's *Fasti*, ii., pp. 169, 170.

Faithful Witness-Bearing Exemplified fill ten double-columned pages. The first name under Kilmarnock is: "Reverend Mr. John Russell, minister of the Gospell." This is the Russell who figures in five of Burns' poems, viz., in "The Twa Herds," the "Epistle to John Goldie," "The Holy Fair," "The Ordination," and "The Kirk of Scotland's Alarm." In the first of these he is thus referred to:—

"What herd like Russell tell'd his tale?
His voice was heard thro' muir and dale."

Howie also took part in the "lifting controversy," which controversy led to a split in the Anti-Burgher branch of the Secession Church. The disruption was led by David Smyton, the aged minister of Kilmaurs congregation. Howie took Smyton's side in the dispute, that is, he maintained that in the administration of the Lord's Supper the minister ought to take or touch or lift the elements before giving thanks, as Christ had done. Smyton's case was set forth in a pamphlet entitled:—

"An Apology and Vindication, or the practice and binding obligation of following Christ's institution and example in the administration of the Supper asserted and defended. To which is added, an appendix, containing copies of some original papers, with some short account of what transpired at last meeting of Synod in the case of the Rev. Mr. David Smyton, and a copy of his Declaration of Secession from them, and his reasons for so doing. Published by a committee appointed by (*sic*) order and in name of the Petitioners and Remonstrators in the Associate Congregations in Kilmaurs, Beith, Paisley, and Kilwinning. [Num. ix. 2, Luke xx. 19, I Cor. xi. 2 quoted.] Glasgow: Printed by John Bryce for the authors, and sold by G. Caldwell, Paisley; G. Laird, Greenock; and J. Wilson, Kilmarnock; etc. M.DCC.LXXXIII."

Howie's share in this pamphlet seems to have cost him more thought and study than any volume which he wrote or edited. His name does not appear in it; but the portion entitled, "The practice and binding obligation of following

Christ's institution and example in the administration of the Supper asserted and defended", may be safely assigned to him. This portion extends from p. 17 to p. 84. The books cited in it are of the kind which he possessed, and with which he was familiar. And here it may be mentioned that, for an eighteenth-century, moorland farmer, he had a pretty extensive and well-selected library of theological, historical, and controversial books and pamphlets. Though it has been plundered by dishonest borrowers since his death, enough still remains to show that the items had been chosen with care and judgment. The genuine pleasure of possessing such a library was no doubt enhanced by the self-denial and economy which had rendered its formation possible.¹⁵

In 1787 he issued another volume. It was entitled: "*Reformation Principles, etc., Re-exhibited*". It was printed in Glasgow by David Niven, for Robert Farie, bookseller, Saltmarket. It contains (1) The Covenants as they were renewed at Douglas in 1712; and (2) Plain Reasons for Presbyterians dissenting from the Revolution-Church in Scotland. The first of these had been originally published in 1712; and the other in 1731. The "Plain Reasons" were amended and enlarged by Howie, whose address "to the understanding reader" is dated "Lochgoin, March 22d, 1787". The subscribers' names fill eight double-columned pages.

The last book which Howie prepared for the press was written by John Brown of Wamphray. Here is the title-page:—

"A mirror: or Looking-Glass for Saint and Sinner. The important doctrines of the Law and Gospel opened up in a practical essay, from Gal. ii. 19. *For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.* &c. By that eminent and laborious servant of Christ, Mr. John Brown, sometime minister of the Gospel at Wamphray.

¹⁵ A description of the books and relics still preserved at Lochgoin is given in Thomson's *Martyr Graves of Scotland*, 1875, i., pp. 150-164; 1903 ed., pp. 83-91. Some of them I have described in *Scottish National Memorials*, 1890, pp. 107-115.

Glasgow: Printed for Peter M'Arthur, Bookseller, Paisley. M.DCC.XCIII."

In the preface (which is dated "Lochgoin, August 1792"), Howie says:

"This amongst others of his [i. e. Brown's] last remains in manuscript has undergone a very remarkable providence as to its particular discovery, on the very eve of inevitable wreck, which affords a powerful motive for its preservation by publication. And if any doubt of the authenticity thereof, in whole or in any article, they may be satisfied in a view of the author's own hand-writ (as is more than supposable), from which it was transcribed, not without some toil and trouble."

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The MS. which Howie copied for the press was, he apparently believed, in Brown's own hand-writing. The volume is 12mo. and extends to 211 pp. besides the preface and the list of subscriber's names.

In 1809, John Calderwood, Clanfin, edited two of Howie's papers, to which he gave the title:

"Humble Pleadings; or a Representation of Grievances for the consideration of the Reformed Presbytery, wherein their defections, declinings and corruptions, both in principle and practice, is held forth. . . . Likewise a letter to a friend, containing I. Punitive Justice. II. The Mediator's Power. III. A few Remarks or Observations, in answer to some of the groundless reflections cast upon faithful contenders by lukewarm professors. By John Howie in Lochgoin. . . ."

This pamphlet was printed in Kilmarnock by H. & S. Crawford. Three years before this (viz., in 1806), Calderwood had published:

"A Collection of the Dying Testimonies of some holy and pious Christians, who lived in Scotland before and since the Revolution."

It does not appear whether he used John Howie's transcripts for this "Collection"; but it is quite certain that Howie had made copies of at least some of these testi-

¹⁰ *Faithful Contendings*, p. 488, and *Memoirs*, p. 20.

monies.¹⁶ It seems that Howie also intended to publish an edition of Stevenson's *History of the Church and State of Scotland*, and to complete it by a supplement;¹⁷ but death frustrated this project.

It is amazing how a man in Howie's position, with his other daily duties to perform, and far from public libraries, could find time to write and edit so much. By looking into the *Memoirs* this wonder is increased, for there it is made evident that a great part of his time was taken up every day with private prayer and meditation, and family devotions. Doubtless, when engaged with the necessary duties of his moorland farm, his mind was frequently filled with his beloved literary work. At such times many a thought would be crystalized; many of his happiest expressions would assume their final form. In this way his daily open-air avocations would rather help than hinder his more enduring work.

Except on Sabbaths and fast days, he usually took a nap after dinner in summer; in the early evening, in winter. This custom tended to keep him awake in the mornings before it was time to rise. That his mind might be profitably employed on these wakeful mornings, he had texts or truths selected for meditation.

The *Memoirs*, and especially the portion written by himself, show that he was a truly God-fearing man, genuinely sincere and conscientious, striving to walk in the narrow way that leadeth to eternal life. His "predominants", as he calls them, frequently got the better of him, or at least he thought they did. One of these "predominants" was a hasty temper; and, when through provocation he gave way to it, he bitterly bewailed his weakness. He often prayed that he might be kept straight in the way, from falling into anything in his practice that would dishonor God, be offensive to God's people, bring a reproach on religion, or discredit the cause he had done so much for in public. He kept private and family fasts and thanksgivings, over and

¹⁷ Thomson's *Martyr Graves of Scotland*, i., p. 146.

above the public ones appointed by the Reformed Presbytery. He owns that he did not profit so much from hearing sermons as he might have done. This, he says, was partly due to the deceitfulness and treachery of Satan and his own heart; but he thought it was also partly due to the ministers, who might have preached with more caution and faithfulness. Nevertheless, he went long distances to hear sermons and wait upon ordinances. On one occasion he was greatly grieved by the behaviour of a number of the people at Sandihills sacrament. The preaching was in the open air, and there were crowds of hearers; but many were running to and fro drinking, and talking as if they had been in a public market. On the very skirts of the congregation, half dozens were talking and laughing. When in the evening one of the ministers made it a matter of thanksgiving that so many had been present, John Howie thought that had the minister seen what he had seen, it might rather have been a matter for lamentation and grief. He was very fond of singing; and often went into his garden, or little orchard as he sometimes calls it, or out to the muir, to sing psalms. For this purpose he usually carried a psalm-book.

He occasionally went to public executions, not that he had any pleasure in seeing criminals hanged; but he had always "a great desire to hear the last or dying words of people, whether on a death-bed or scaffold", whether *viva voce*, or in print or writing. At an execution in Glasgow he was greatly disappointed, for he heard nothing that could leave an inspiring impression on his mind. Yet when the drop fell (the execution being carried out after the English manner) he thought it left the sound of death in his ears.¹⁸

His disposition, he states, was somewhat soft, and his bodily constitution weak or tender. In his youth he had small-pox, and afterwards fell into a lingering fever, which

¹⁸ "William Penn, for whom exhibitions which humane men generally avoid seem to have had a strong attraction, hastened from Cheapside, where he had seen Cornish hanged, to Tyburn, in order to see Elizabeth Gaunt burned." (Macaulay's *History of England*, 8th edition, i., p. 659.)

threatened to end in consumption. About twelve years before his death, he happened to be driving home peats. The horse was strong and young and restive; and, having bolted, dragged him through a dam of water. He was violently dashed against the dyke or sluice, and let go his grip, and the cart-wheel went over him. Fully three years later he was at a religious meeting in Darvel, and left for home after it was dark. The night was wet and misty; and a thaw was melting the snow. He had to ford three swollen burns; and had great difficulty in getting through them, especially the one he calls "our own burn". The water, which was running above the ice, carried him off his feet, but at last he got hold of a rash-bush, and was able to drag himself out. Such adventures were not good physically for a man who had never been over robust. In 1791 he was troubled with rheumatism, and by and by his illness developed into what was described as "a complex of various disorders", which he was unable to throw off.

In September, 1792, one of his sons went home with small-pox; and the rest of his family, one after another, took the disease. His son John—his son by his first wife—died; and he was himself so frail that it was with difficulty he reached his son's bed-side on the morning of his death. It was a solemn occasion, as he himself said, "two dying persons speaking to one another". Kneeling beside the bed, he "in prayer made a free and ample acknowledgment to the Lord in his son's behalf, as to his sins, original and actual, omission and commission; and then interceded to the Lord for mercy to his soul; and also confessed his own neglect in duty towards him; implored for mercy to them both, to the great surprise of those standing by, being both long and particular as ever they had heard; and he being so weakly in body, became the ~~the~~ more wonderful". A friend continued to pray beside the young man, while the anxious father retired to the byre and prayed alone. While thus wrestling in secret with his Covenant-God, one went into the byre and told him that his son had passed into the

world of spirits. "Has the Lord done this, and hid it from me", he exclaimed, "it wont not to be so in times past; what poor sinful creatures are we! I see I must yet have more haggling. 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!' If I had known this, I had rested none this night; O what is this!"

The stricken father lingered on for a few months, as he had confidently expected he would after hearing this verse of a Psalm sung:

"O spare thou me, that I my strength recover may again,
Before from ~~home~~ I do depart, and here no more remain."

Though a true believer, he never attained to the full assurance of faith; and had always a lurking dread of death. In a foot-note to *Reformation Principles Re-exhibited* (p. 244), he thus, unconsciously perhaps, pictured his own case: "Some have advanced unto heaven's threshold (so to speak) wrestling through the dark avenues of doubts and fears, and yet have anchored safe within the vail at last."

Late in the evening of the 5th of January, 1793, "his soul was removed from its clay tabernacle and weary wilderness of sin and corruption". The last words he was heard to utter were: "Christ would come."

The elements of John Howies' literary success are plain and palpable. He had not only a strong and vigorous intellect, but he confined himself to one line of study, and greedily read everything he could lay hands upon that seemed likely to be helpful; and his line of study was not so much chosen by him, as it gradually grew upon him. From his boyhood he loved to hear and read of the martyrs, reformers, and confessors. And thus he was not only imbued with his subject, but was passionately fond of it. It was this engrossing passion which at first compelled him to write, though he had then no idea of publishing. From the beginning of his career, he was an enthusiast and a spe-

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cialist; and, by constant application, he became an authority and an expert. His style is less simple and less natural than Patrick Walker's; but it has a calm dignity and stateliness which Patrick could not reach; and unlike Patrick he loved to introduce, now and again, a Latin phrase. From the pecuniary point of view his reward does not seem to have been great; but that was not the object he had in view. In one passage he explains that, before writing anything "which was designed for the public", it was his never-failing custom "to pray to the Lord for light and direction"; and that the work "might be frustrated", if it was not for God's honour and glory. He rejoiced to know that his writings had been useful and beneficial to others, and was gratified by the new friendships they brought him.

All that he wrote bore more or less directly on the principles and contendings of the afflicted Church of Scotland. A faithful Cameronian himself, he not only cherished the memory, but tenaciously adhered to the principles, of those who counted no sacrifice too great in the cause of revealed truth, and regarded no truth as too insignificant to die for. Had he been spared, each edition of his *Scots Worthies* would have been improved in details and enlarged. As it is he has the honour of having become one of the first three of the old-fashioned, popular, religious writers of Scotland. These three are William Guthrie of Fenwick, Samuel Rutherford, and John Howie. It was fitting that the third should write biographies of the other two; and it is a noteworthy coincidence that the first and the third—Guthrie and Howie—should have spent the best part of their lives in the same country parish. Hard behind these three in popularity come Thomas Boston of Ettrick, and Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, both of whom far surpassed Guthrie in the quantity of their literary output; but no work of their's reached an eightieth edition as Guthrie's *Saving Interest* seems to have done, or a sixtieth as Rutherford's *Letters*, or even a fiftieth as *The Scots Worthies*.

Edinburgh.

D. HAY FLEMING.



